



SERMON,

DELIVERED

BEFORE THE MEMBERS

OF THE

FEMALE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY,

IN

MONTREAL,

SEPTEMBER 8, 1816.

BY ROBERT EASTON,

MINISTER OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ST. PETER STREET.

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REV. ROBERT EASTON,

REV. SIR,

AT a special meeting of the BOARD of MANAGERS of the FEMALE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY this day, it was unanimously voted to present the cordial thanks of the Society, to you Sir, for your excellent and appropriate Sermon, preached before the Members of that Institution, and to request a copy for the press.

By order,

H. W. BARRETT,

Secretary.

MONTREAL, SEPTEMBER 16th, 1816.

MRS. H. W. BARRETT, *SECRETARY,*

MADAM,

WHATEVER are the real merits of the discourse delivered before the Members of the FEMALE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY, I am happy at least to find that the MANAGERS of the Institution are satisfied with my feeble efforts to promote one of the best of causes. Before I received their friendly request, I had consented to the printing of the Sermon, but upon a principle which will leave the proceeds of the sale at the disposal of the Society, according to the intention of the publishers, which is highly honourable to them.

I am, Madam,

with respect yours, &c.

R. EASTON.

MONTREAL, SEPTEMBER 16th, 1816.

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SERMON.

LUKE, x. 29—37.

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?
And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.
And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.
And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.
But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,
And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.
And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee.
Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?
And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

COMPASSION is one of our natural endowments. The multifarious trials and afflictions of this life produce frequent calls for the exercise of it. The christian religion, by exhorting us to *bear one*

another's burdens, to weep with them who weep, exalts this natural instinct into an evangelical virtue, and recommends it to our culture.

Whatever, then, tends to contract or enervate the sympathetic feelings of our nature, may be justly suspected of seducing us from the path of our duty ; if it be religion, we may be sure that such a religion is not from God. If we become hard-hearted to our own flesh from particular views of honor and interest, we may be no less certain that our ideas of honor and interest are most erroneous. If our sympathy be confined to our kindred, favourites, or fellow subjects in its very utmost extent ; if all beyond these limits be cold insensibility, or slender emotion : where is the proof that we still possess the unadulterated sentiments of nature, or act on the generous maxims of true religion ?

Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself, is the second commandment in the law. Do you ask, as did the lawyer spoken of in the text, *Who is my neighbour ?* From the reply of the illustrious teacher of the world, we learn that every man is thus nearly related to us, that whoever wears the human form challenges our respect, and, being found in a state of wretchedness, is entitled to relief.

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The duty of impartial charity, in every way answerable to the cases of the necessitous, will occupy our attention ; after we have glanced

I. At that striking picture of inhumanity and tenderness, which is presented to our view, in the opposite behaviour of two jewish priests and a Samaritan.

A certain man, travelling betwixt Jericho and Jerusalem, fell in company with some merciless highwaymen, who stript him of his clothes, and left him so badly wounded, that he could in no wise help himself. A misfortune of this kind is peculiarly calculated to move compassion. The man's unoffending character, his gaping wounds, painful sensations, and forlorn condition spake a language, which every passenger, who approached him, might be supposed to feel. But it appears, from unquestionable authority, that two passengers, whose eyes and ears were necessarily attracted by the novelty of the scene, behaved more like brutes than men ; for they offered, neither to assist him themselves, nor to interest others in his behalf : but, crossing to the other side of the road, they went on their journey as unconcerned, as the robbers, who had done the mischief.

Whilst no consideration can justify, or even extenuate such unfeeling neglect ; some circumstan-

oes heighten the enormity of the crime: if the unfortunate man, as is commonly presumed, was a son of Abraham, he was the more entitled to the condolence and aid of Jewish spectators. One might expect that a people, excessively prepossessed against foreigners, as the Jews were, would at least vie with one another, in expressions of respect and kindness for members of their own community: but the truth is, that, where any national prejudice is carried to a high pitch, it is so much associated with pride and malice, as to afford no guarantee of good usage, even within the bounds of professed attachment.—Another aggravating circumstance in the conduct of these men arose from their employment: the one is called a priest, the other a Levite, professed ministers of a gracious God, whose temple, whose altars, and institutions, with which they were familiar, bore no other impress but that of mercy. What an odious contrast! what a disgrace to their name and sacred functions! Ministers of religion, who live solely to themselves, are of all God's creatures the most hurtful; for their putting on of holy vestments, and officiating at the altars of piety, are the very channels, thro' which they convey, with too much success, the poison of their selfish and immoral lives. They are like gangrenes in the human bo-

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dy : and the evil must terminate, either in their excision, or in the death of piety and virtue within the sphere of their influence.

The apathy and selfishness of these proud ecclesiastics are finely contrasted, in the passage before us, with the tenderness and natural simplicity of a Samaritan, who came after them, had compassion on the afflicted man, dressed his wounds, and took every possible care of him. The Samaritan's interest in a scene of so much distress banished all other concerns from his mind ; till he had removed this child of adversity from an exposure on the public road, and placed him under some auspicious roof, where proper attention might be paid to his recovery. Money in such a case was no object. The gratification of pity, and the deliverance of an unfortunate fellow creature were of far more value than any earthly good. The Samaritan judged so ; and, therefore, gave money to the host, perhaps all he had, and promised more, on condition that every thing was done, that could be done for the poor man.

The conduct of this friend of humanity answers our ideas of pure disinterested benevolence. He could have no views of recompense for what he did. The frigid distinction betwixt Jews and Samaritans, which tended to contract the heart and palsy

the hand of kindness, had no such effect on his natural sensibility : laying aside all national antipathies, attending exclusively to the claims of human nature in a suffering condition, he performed an act of mercy, which, it seems, was too far below the dignity of a jewish priest and Levite to perform.

It is obvious that Jesus Christ, the author of this instructive story, was highly pleased with the amiable Samaritan ; and that the lawyer, with whom he conversed, could not withhold his approbation. The command, given to the latter, was an inference, which could not be controverted, and which is applicable to all ; *go, and do thou likewise*. It was proposed in the

II. To consider the reasonableness of this command, to shew that merciful and benevolent attentions form an indispensable duty ; and one, which embraces all descriptions of human sufferers. The same principle, which led the good Samaritan to succour the wounded Jew, would have directed him to bestow relief, in every other case of distress, which came before him. Arguments, to enforce this duty, crowd upon us from every quarter. The benign attributes and beneficent works of the Almighty, the compassions of the great high priest of our profession, the unavoidable evils of this life,

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the only natural mode of softening them by the voice of brotherly love and the hand of charity, concur to manifest the importance of these religious precepts; *look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Thou shalt open thy hand wide to thy brother, to thy poor, to thy needy in the land.*

As the time usually allotted to one discourse would not allow our dwelling upon a variety of arguments, I shall select three for our present meditation: these shall be drawn from the plan of the divine government with respect to mortals, from human responsibility, from the spirit and genius of the gospel.

1. The plan of the divine government of this world evidently points out the propriety and necessity of being affectionate and charitable. The disappointments, afflictions and sorrows, by which some are severely tried, and to which all are liable, never happen by chance. They come from the hand of the supreme Ruler, who *is wise in heart, and mighty in strength.* Both the sunshine and storms of human life, both its joyous events and painful vicissitudes originate in the will of God, and bear the marks of wisdom, as well as sovereignty. One great design of the many varieties which we see in human lots, is undoubtedly to prove

men's love of one another. The providence of God places some men in easy circumstances, and leaves others to struggle with want and misery. The bounties of Heaven are lavished upon a few; whilst a multitude of others procure with difficulty a pittance to alleviate the calls of hunger, and to clothe their nakedness: and, when their health is taken away, or some disabling accident happens to them, their scanty means are immediately cut off. Perhaps in the vicinity of some dwelling, where no wants are felt, where a plentiful board and smiling joy are the order of every day, a family may be found with hardly a mouthful of bread, shivering over a few dying embers in a cold winter's night; the father or mother lying in some corner of the wretched apartment, at the point of death, without cordials, without medical aid, without clothing suited to their situation: merciful God! what else can be thine intention, but that the possessors of plenty should look after the destitute, support and comfort them? Yea verily, Heaven created these inequalities, that compassion and liberality on the one hand, and gratitude on the other might be carried through all varieties of human woe. In order to promote the exercise of these virtues, the tender Parent of the human race has promised his blessing to the merciful man, and blighted with a curse the

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person and possessions of the churl : *blessed is he that considereth the poor ; the Lord will deliver him in the time of trouble : but whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, and shall not be heard.*

2. We are responsible to the Almighty for whatever we receive from him : and he is the author of every blessing, which we enjoy ; *for every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.* As men sprang from nothing, what can they have which they do not receive ? Their mental endowments and external possessions originate in the power and goodness of that Being, who made the worlds. His will, therefore, with regard to our application of his bounty, ought to be consulted ; unless it can be proved that our receipts contain a surrender of all original right and title to the things bestowed : but this cannot be proved. The infinitely wise Jehovah retains his right. His grants concern merely the use of his property. None of his intelligent creatures are invested with a discretionary power to act their pleasure, without being answerable for what they do. *The earth has been given to the children of men, yet the earth is still the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.* The silver and gold are his, the fax and wool, the wine and oil, the cattle

upon a thousand hills—We are only the servants and stewards of the Almighty. Duty and interest require a steward to be faithful, to observe the rules laid down to him. If he squanders his master's property, or hoards it up for his own gratification, he runs the risk of being deprived of his stewardship, and punished for injustice and breach of trust.

Let us, then, see what are the instructions of the great Proprietor, and adhere to them, as the rule, by which our conduct will be finally approved or condemned. How does he wish us to employ our thoughts and the organ of speech, in relation to our neighbours? Surely not in devising their hurt and speaking evil of them; most assuredly in promoting their welfare, in teaching the ignorant, reprehending the vicious, warning the refractory, cheering the disconsolate, soothing the anguish'd heart. *Be ye all of one mind*, says he, *having compassion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing.*

What is to be done with a superfluity of the good things of this life? Hearken, in like manner, to the voice of God, and you cannot go wrong. He recommends a distribution of it among the needy of our species. *Thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor*

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shut thine hand from the poor brother. *Is not this the fast that I have chosen?—To deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? To do good, and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

Since the Lord of the creation is thus particular in stating his will, with regard to the management of his lent property; can we conceive a greater violation of the laws of equity and goodness, than to apply it to sinister and contrary purposes? That man, who sports with the character and feelings of others, whose thoughts and tongue are under the direction of envy, pride and hatred, is as unfaithful to the author of his being, as he is injurious to society. The miser also, who heaps up wealth for the odd pleasure of having and seeing it, and that benefactor, who grudges to do any thing for the relief of those who do not belong to the narrow circle of his kindred and familiars, are in fact more to be pitied than the objects of their oppression and neglect: for the latter are only accountable for the rags which cover them, for that pittance of bread which keeps them from starving; but the former must answer to the giver of all good for

shutting their bowels from their own flesh in a state of want.

Some reason in a strange manner against an extension of usefulness with the property they possess ; lest, by such liberality, they bring themselves into similar circumstances of dependence and need : thus reversing a proverb, which is founded on the certainty of an overruling providence in human affairs. *There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth ; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.*

I would not be understood, however, as arguing against a judicious prudence in doing good, far less against a free enjoyment of what is put into a man's hands, by a bounteous God. Every holder of Heaven is allowed to appropriate to his own use, whatever is necessary for the support of his rank and credit in the world. But, after this appropriation has been made, the beneficiaries of God, in general, will still find that enough remains to render them obliging and highly useful to those who are not so well provided for ; nor will they ever be backward in doing what may be expected of them, if the will and favour of the most High are more to them, than any selfish and unnecessary gratifications.

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3. Believing the truth and importance of the gospel, we are particularly called to *put on bowels of mercies, kindness* ; for the christian religion is all benevolence. It represents the human race as depraved and wretched, the love of God the Father as falling upon a singular contrivance for the recovery and happiness of an apostate world, viz. by the sacrifice of his only begotten and well beloved Son, who was himself a perfect model of the gentle virtues : the law of kindness dwelt upon the lips of Messiah : charity burned in his breast, and shone thro' all his actions with a refulgent and steady lustre. He could never hear the voice of misery among friends or foes, without exerting himself to produce a change of circumstances ; in one instance, where hardened guilt, and the awful consequences belonging to it, remained unalterable, he felt so keenly, that the tears flowed from his eyes. His whole life was spent in the service of the wretched. Neither the stings of ingratitude, nor the shafts of malice could deter him, for one moment, from benevolent pursuits. His very last remains of life, his dying breath were consecrated to the same cause, for which he had spent his days ; that of alleviating temporal, and preventing eternal miseries—No wonder that such an affectionate and a zealous benefactor thought well of the tender

hearted Samaritan, and held him up as an example, worthy of being followed.

Can you contemplate, my brethren, the outlines of christianity, or the portrait of its author, without coming to this conclusion, that, *if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*? Do you not perceive that a great part of the proof of your christian character consists, in sympathizing with the children of sorrow, and helping them as much as lies in your power? Can those men or women be actually partakers of the blessings of the gospel, or followers of Jesus Christ; who are shut up in themselves, whose bowels seldom yearn at the sight of foreign woe, and whose hands are still more seldom raised to succour poverty in distress, or wipe the tears of silent sorrow from the faces of the widow and fatherless? What resemblance do such characters bear, in spirit and conduct, to the Father of mercies and the Saviour of the world? *Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*

The primitive christians were famous for an open hearted and a liberal conduct. At one time, they had all things common for the better support of the indigent; at another, their attention to the wants of the poor and the sorrows of the afflicted

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was so great, that their very enemies imputed the triumphs of the cross in heathen lands to this cause. Institutions purely charitable, combining the efforts of many, followed the introduction of christianity. And wherever the principles of the *man of sorrows* are duly respected, and human wants are urgent, such institutions will always arise, and meet with liberal encouragement.

Thus, my brethren, let the designs of the Author of life by so many varieties of human condition, the laws of Heaven regulating the use of talents and property, and the spirit and genius of the christian religion, let these be properly understood and strictly regarded ; and we shall find, in our own breasts, an irresistible plea for indigence and sorrow, a very strong inducement to attend to those of our species, who require counsel, support and aid. Indeed, how can we better express our gratitude for a happier lot, or better please ourselves, than by indulging the best feelings of our nature, and performing the most important duties of social life.

If such considerations are admitted, in reference to the humane object of our present meeting, it may be presumed that all, who compose this assembly, will readily conclude that it is *more blessed to give than to receive.*

We are met this night, at the request of a number of ladies, who have formed themselves into a society for the very laudable purpose of *relieving indigent women with small children, the sick, the aged, and infirm*. How far they have succeeded ; how far it is possible for them to succeed in a place, where few in want of such assistance were once supposed to exist, I am glad it is in my power, by a statement of facts, to give the most satisfactory evidence. At a meeting of the Society last week, it was ascertained that, in the space of six months, *fifty* individuals, some of whom were connected with families, had received essential benefit from the institution. Some of these might have been in their graves, if the assiduity of female tenderness and care had not been the means of their preservation : others of them, who are dead, have carried with them into the world of spirits, a memorial of kindness, which is put to the credit of the society in the books of God—Ah, my hearers, besides that description of poor, who are never backward to make known their wants ; I do assure you that there are in Montreal, as well as in other cities, cases which neither force themselves on the public eye, nor appear before your doors. It is partly the business of this amiable society, to search for

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unknown and hidden sufferers, and bring them from under the shades which conceal their distress.

Much good has been already done : and it is done with so much discrimination, and affectionate inquiry into the circumstances of cases, that there can hardly be a misapplication of charity ; and none of that distant and austere mode of bestowing it, which, to a delicate mind, is a remedy worse than the disease.

Before I conclude, my judgment and feelings direct me to observe to you, who are managers and members of this institution, that you have entered a path consecrated by the example of ages, and the present walk of many other christian females, to your immortal honor and theirs, to the satisfaction of your God, to the praise of your Redeemer's principles, and to the great benefit of frail and dying flesh. Go on, my worthy friends, continue to make *the widow's heart to sing for joy, to search out the cause which you knew not* : continue to anoint the sick, to soften the painful wounds of destiny, with the sacred oil of christian compassion. *The eye, which sees you thus employed, will bear witness to you : because you delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him.* You may meet with a few difficulties : but let not these discourage you from pursu-

ing a plan of benevolence, which is as becoming in your sex, as it is highly profitable. I congratulate mothers on the formation of a society, which enables them, in educating their daughters, to give the best finishing to the female character, by training it to *works of mercy and labours of love*.

In fine, I would not disgrace the name of man, far less the character of a christian, by supposing that there is an individual, in this assembly, in the smallest degree averse to the support of an institution so necessary, efficient, liberal, Godlike. In fact it is doing all of you a favour, to present you with an opportunity of offering to the Lord a part of that whole, which is his own. Remaining in your own possession, it may be useful to the poor; but in the possession of a charitable society, discriminating betwixt real and fictitious distress, and betwixt different degrees of wretchedness, and guarding against all abuses from immoral habits; it cannot fail to be useful. What you may be disposed to give this night goes, you may be assured, to ease some dying pains, to banish want and the fear of greater from some reduced and heart-broken family, to put the fallen staff into the hand of some weary pilgrim, and conduct him or her to some shelter from the raging storm.—Besides, if you give from right motives, you are not spending

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property ; you are laying up treasure in heaven, where you will receive it back with the highest interest. A parsimonious and an illiberal disposition might be ready to blame the widow who cast her whole living into the treasury : but her conduct met the approbation of him, who was conscious of having it in his power to recompense her in this life and at the resurrection of the just. If this instance of generosity is not a rule to others, the approbation of our Lord is at least a decided evidence of the high rank, which charity holds among the graces. *This, therefore, I say, he who soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly ; and he who soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give ; not grudgingly, or of necessity : for God loveth a cheerful giver.*

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